

How to Go Green without Getting the Blues

Understanding Maryland's Licensing Requirements for Green Technology

Maryland Home Improvement Commission Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation

As many homeowners consider investing in green technology for their homes, it is important to ensure that each contractor and subcontractor holds the correct license to do the job in a safe and workmanlike manner, and in compliance with State and local licensing laws and regulations. Hiring a properly licensed professional to perform the energy efficiency improvements may be the difference between making a wise investment that will increase the value of your home while lowering your energy costs versus losing money and destroying your property.

Knowing the licensing laws and local requirements before you invest your money is the first step to completing a successful green project.

Licenses, Permits and Inspections

Depending on the type of green project, one or more of the following licenses may be required to perform work on your property:

- Electrician
- HVACR
- Plumber
- Home improvement

It is important to know what type of license your contractor holds and to ensure that the contractor does not perform work outside of the scope of that license. For example a home improvement contractor's license does not authorize the licensee to perform electric, HVACR or plumbing work.

In addition to having the proper license, contractors must comply with the requirements of the locality or jurisdiction where the work will be performed. In some cases, homeowners have been fined or have been required have the work removed due to a contractor's failure to obtain the proper permits.

Home Improvement Commission (MHIC)

The Maryland Home Improvement Commission issues licenses to home improvement contractors, subcontractors and salespersons. Most green projects on residential property fall within the definition of "home improvement" and therefore must comply with the requirements of the Home Improvement Law. "Home improvement" includes installing solar panels, windmills, or insulation, as well as other products that are permanently attached to your home or land. The following services and products are most commonly used by homeowners to "go green."

Energy Audits

A comprehensive assessment of your home and its energy-using systems provides you with information regarding the existing condition of your home and identifies areas where energy efficiency, comfort and safety upgrades can be made. An energy auditor is not required to hold a MHIC license or to be a licensed home inspector; however, if the individual performs any work as a result of the energy audit (beyond changing light bulbs or a shower head), a home improvement license will most likely be required.

Geothermal Heat and Power

Geothermal systems must be installed by a licensed HVACR contractor. The individual who digs the well must hold a State-issued well-drillers license and the person who lays the pipe must be a licensed plumber or HVACR contractor. Any required connection to the potable water supply must be done by a licensed master plumber.

Insulation

All types of insulation, regardless of the materials or the installation technique used, must be installed by a licensed MHIC contractor or subcontractor.

Rain Barrels

Rain barrels that sit underneath a downspout and are not permanently attached to the downspout or the ground are not considered to be "home improvement;" therefore the seller or installer is not required to hold a MHIC license.

Solar Panels

Solar panel systems must be mounted by a licensed home improvement contractor or subcontractor, regardless of whether the system is attached to the roof or other part of the house, or attached to the land adjacent to the house. The individual who connects the solar panels to the electric box or to the grid is required to hold an electrician's license issued by the local jurisdiction where the property is located. If the solar panel will be used to heat water, such as a hot water heater or a pool, then a licensed plumber is required to connect the system to the potable water supply.

Windmills and Wind Turbines

Windmills or wind turbines must be mounted or installed by a licensed home improvement contractor or subcontractor, regardless of whether the windmill's base is attached to the roof or other part of the house, or attached to the land adjacent to the house. The individual who connects the windmill or wind turbine to the electric box or to the grid is required to hold a master electrician's license issued by the local jurisdiction where the property is located. Only a few local jurisdictions in the State do not issue local master electrician's license, in which case, the individual making the connection must hold a State master electrician's license.

Licensing, Permits and Inspection Agencies

Maryland Board of Heating, Ventilation, Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration (HVACR) Contractors
410-230- 6270
Licenses HVACR contractors

Maryland Home Improvement Commission
410-230-6309
Licenses home improvement contractors, subcontractors and salespersons

Maryland Board of Master Electricians
410-230-6270
Licenses master electricians (local license also required)

Maryland Board of Plumbing
410-230-6270
Licenses plumbers to perform work in State (except for Baltimore, Montgomery and Prince George's Counties)

Howard County Department of Licensing, Inspections and Permits
410-313-2455
Licenses plumbing work performed in Howard County

*This information has been edited by the Office of Consumer Affairs to include specific information for Howard County residents.
Questions or comments regarding the Maryland Home Improvement Commission may be directed to mhic@dllr.state.md.us.
Questions or comments regarding the Division of Occupational and Professional Licensing may be directed to op@dllr.state.md.us.
Questions or comments regarding the DLLR website may be directed to webmaster@dllr.state.md.us.*

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